

National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board

Annual Review and Recommendation on Relevancy and Adequacy of Funding for Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economic Activities Conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2008, the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board (the Board) conducted the annual review of the Relevancy and Adequacy of Funding for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Research, Education, and Extension (REE) Mission areas, in alignment with the Department's strategic goals. As indicated in the narrative accompanying the President's Budget request, the following priorities were identified for REE agencies, and were examined by the Board: 1) expand domestic market opportunities, 2) reduce the number and severity of agricultural pest and disease outbreaks, and 3) promote healthier eating habits and lifestyles.

The Board fully supports and endorses the recommendations presented in previous Relevancy and Adequacy of Funding reports and presents the current report to provide additional recommendations. Since the last Relevancy and Adequacy of Funding report, the Board reviewed the following topic areas: Specialty Crops, Food Safety, Organic Agriculture, National Agriculture Library, and Rural Economics and Community Development. The topic areas were well-aligned with the priority areas set forth in the 2008 President's budget.

In the May 2007 Specialty Crop Report, the Board identified that the specialty crop industry is urgently in need of research to identify pathogens, address invasive arthropods, develop practices to improve efficiency, productivity and profitability, and to increase the competitiveness of the nursery industry. The Board commends the increase in funding allocated to colony collapse disorder in honeybees, but also notes that given the range of invasive pathogens and arthropods in the broad category of specialty crops, the \$1.7 million devoted to improving plant genetics resources to enhance resistance is grossly inadequate. Also, although the stated priority is to expand domestic market opportunities, no increases in research activities have been proposed in this area of the current budget.

The Food Safety Report, completed in June 2007, recommended that REE take leadership in supporting basic and applied research programs to develop sensors and detection devices for food borne pathogens and that additional investments be made in genomics of microbial pathogens and systems biology approaches to understand communities of food borne pathogens. Such pathogens could cause devastating agricultural disease outbreaks leading to severe economic losses. The Board recommends continuing collaboration with other Federal programs to support these priorities.

In the February 2008 Organic Agriculture Report, the Board commended the leadership of REE for increasing research, education and extension support for organic agriculture, specifically the

addition of a national program leader in organic agriculture within CSREES. It was further recommended that a periodic report on “Progress in Organic Agriculture” be produced to continue focus on the most important needs. While not delineated specifically in the President’s budget, the Board recommended that CSREES examine each of its programs in higher education for the opportunity to support organic agriculture. The Board also enthusiastically supported the “Organic Agriculture Clearing House,” a national resource for all information pertaining to organic agriculture.

The Board conducted an extensive five-year review of the USDA National Agriculture Library (NAL), which culminated in a February 2008 report. The Board found NAL to be a priceless resource, and recommended initiating development of a fully functional and NAL-shared Digital Library for Agriculture (NDAL) and also recommended a funding request for facility improvements. The President’s budget indicated a \$3 million decrease in funding from 2008 to 2009, yet the narrative states that the 2009 budget contains a \$1 million increase for internet cataloging, suggesting that the remainder of the NAL budget has been significantly cut elsewhere. The NAL is significantly underfunded, which is severely limiting its effectiveness, and the Board urgently recommends remedial action.

The Rural Economics and Community Development Report from May 2008 recognized that USDA, CSREES, and ERS had focused increased attention on farm operator and non-farm entrepreneurship and research to assist with the development of committees on rural entrepreneurship. Investments by USDA, private foundations, other Federal agencies, and state and local governments have increased the knowledge base and demonstrated positive impacts of entrepreneurship in rural economies and community development, which is in support of the priority to expand domestic market opportunities. However, USDA is encouraged to make a major investment in an extension program of Rural Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development of \$50 million annually to provide competitive funding to programs qualified to provide educational, organizational, and technical assistance to rural businesses.

In summary, the Board’s most recent review of the relevancy and adequacy of funding for agricultural research, extension, education and economic activities conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture found activities which supported stated priorities and were in alignment with the strategic goals for the department. The Board commends USDA for identifying priorities and for the successes demonstrated in addressing them. However, funding was found to be markedly insufficient, and recommendations were made accordingly.